

On behalf of the working men and women of Minnesota, I am proud to support this legislation.

BLUE DOG COALITION

HON. LINCOLN DAVIS

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 6, 2007

Mr. LINCOLN DAVIS of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, one of the benefits in being a Member of Congress is the privilege of working in our Nation's Capitol. The United States Capitol, in my mind, is among the greatest museums in the world—filled with fine art, intricate architecture, and amazing statues of our country's most important historical figures.

Obviously, the Capitol is a place of great historical significance. One of the most important votes ever taken in this House was the declaration of war against Japan on December 8, 1941. This was followed 3 days later with declarations against the Axis, Germany and Italy. This in turn was followed in 1942 by declarations against Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. My friends, this was the last time Congress formally declared war against any nation.

For me, and I know for many of my friends in the Blue Dog Coalition, the opportunity to serve in this body is an honor bestowed on us by our constituents. Quite frankly, a great responsibility comes with this honor—a responsibility to represent the views of all our constituents, rather than the views of partisans on the left and right. This is why the Blue Dog Coalition advocates for a middle-ground in our policies, and I think the American people agree, the middle is the best place to govern. Madam Speaker, we have to be bipartisan, we have to be sensible, and we have to try and work together in a harmonious way to find solutions to the difficulties facing our Nation.

When I first came to Congress a Member asked me what I wanted to change about America. I thought about this real hard, and I was surprised at how quickly I came to my answer. My answer was that I did not want to change America. No country in the world cares for its citizens and provides them with the amount of support as the government of these United States of America. While I do not want to change America, our country does have problems, and I think we can address these best by working together. So, I want to challenge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, let us start being a little more civil and little more cooperative with each other.

Two weeks ago the House debated a resolution honoring our soldiers and disagreeing with the President's proposal to send an additional 21,500 troops to Iraq. Sadly, many of my friends on the other side of the aisle allowed the debate to disintegrate into questions about the patriotism of Members of Congress, as though you are only patriotic if we blindly follow the President's every decision lock step. How shameful. I wonder what our Founding Fathers would think of the idea that the President's policies shouldn't be question or criticized. Seems to me if that was the Founder's goal they wouldn't have created the Congress, a bicameral co-equal branch of government. Instead they would have suggested we create a new kingdom out of America, or perhaps ad-

vocated for a government very similar to the one we overthrew in Iraq. Thankfully, in their infinite wisdom the Founders understood the necessity of debate, of questioning the administrations' policies, of a representative Republic. How ironic that members of the Republican Party came down to the floor and questioned the patriotism of Members of Congress for doing exactly what the Founders intended—debate policies so you can arrive at the best decision for the American people.

Now, one of the biggest challenges facing America, and something Congress debates every year around this time is our budget situation and our deficit. In 1980 I was elected to the State House in Tennessee. I remember one day traveling to Nashville from my home in Byrdstown when I heard on the radio that we had just increased our national debt to \$1 trillion. That frightened me. A trillion dollars is a lot of money, but it was a particularly high amount in the 1980s. Back then it was a struggle to raise our debt limit by \$15 to \$20 billion. Now we raise our debt ceiling every year by hundreds of billions of dollars without even batting an eye. Many times we do it without having an up-or-down vote on that particular debt increase.

After I heard that report on the radio back in 1981 I began to pay closer attention to our national debt. Over the next 12 years I watched as our debt grew by almost \$3 trillion. I kept thinking to myself, how is this possible? It took almost 200 years for the debt to reach \$1 trillion, and yet, over a short period of time in the 80s and early 90s the debt tripled. Then in the 1990's we put in place pay-as-you-go budget rules that forced Congress and the administration to budget like every American family—meaning that the Federal Government could only spend what it took in. The result was a return to budget surpluses that helped us actually pay down a little bit of our national debt. Now, I know it was only a projection, but by the time President Clinton left office we were looking at having a 10-year surplus over \$5 trillion. Unfortunately, the next administration and Republican-led Congress allowed PAYGO to expire and the results were predictable, and \$8 trillion reverse of fortunes. So now we find ourselves in a situation where our annual deficits, excluding the Social Security surplus, exceed \$400 billion and our national debt is currently \$8.8 trillion, which amounts to \$29,000 for every man, woman, and child in this country. Where is the fiscal responsibility in that? What happened to the Republican Party? The so-called party of smaller government just couldn't resist dipping into the Treasury's cookie jar to feed their spending frizzy. Sadly, the big losers of this policy are my grandchildren and the soldiers returning home from war. They will be the ones taxed with paying down our debt. That, my friends, is immoral and shameful.

You know, my chief of staff recently had a baby they nicknamed Willis. The first thing Willis did when he came into this world was cry. Now I know why he was crying. He had just been born and he inherited his share of the national debt—\$29,000. By the time he is old enough to have a job his share of the debt limit will be more than five times the cost of the first house I bought for my family in the late 1960s. We have got to do better than this. We have a moral responsibility to do better than this. This Congress has taken the first steps by reinstating PAYGO rules in the

House. Now we must go one step further and make them part of the statute.

Now, I would like to go back and talk about Iraq a little more. Too often I hear folks in this Chamber saying the Democratic policy is "cut and run" and the White House policy is "stay the course." Both of these are wrong. We can't stay the course, and we can't cut and run.

Last week I saw that Vice President CHENEY was in Japan thanking our troops, and I remembered that we still have troops in Japan following World War II. We also have military bases still operating in Germany from that war. Additionally, we have thousands of troops in South Korea even though the Korean War ended long ago. We still have soldiers in Kosovo and Bosnia and Serbia and the Balkans from our involvement there in the 1990s. You know, it is worth noting that our friends on the other side of the aisle criticized President Clinton in the 1990s for our involvement in that conflict, saying it was not our duty to "Nation build," and they wanted to set up a timetable for withdrawal. I believe our current President even lobbied those criticisms when he was a candidate. Sometimes I feel like hypocrisy is the currency of Washington.

Continuing to look around the world you will notice we have a military presence in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Of course some of them are there for our current war, but many were there beforehand as a result of the Persian Gulf war. The Persian Gulf war was U.N.-sanctioned, and it is my understanding that we overwhelmed Saddam Hussein with our troop numbers, and then we used no-fly-zone in the south and north to essentially block him in his own country. But we had to keep our military in the area to protect the vast oil reserves in the Middle East region of the world.

In my opinion, from looking at history, we will always have a military presence in the Middle East. The question is how will we stay in the Middle East?

Quite frankly, we must stay in the Middle East in a manner that will help ensure the security and peace of the area. Of course we want the Iraqis to win the peace and control their own country, so the key issue is how do we help them in this endeavor? Since we destroyed the Iraqi army, one that was able to resist a larger Iranian army for 10 years, we must act as their army until we have trained enough of their new army to the point where they can take over. In the meantime, I believe we need to pull our troops out of the kill zone in Baghdad and move them to the border with Syria and Iran to cut off any support for the insurgency that may be coming from those countries. At the same time the Iraqi police forces and new military must engage and control the fight within the country. It is their country; they have to win the peace. However, we can and should support them in eliminating any terrorist cells that pop up in Iraq. I believe we can do this with quick-strike forces and our advanced weaponry with minimal American casualties.

Twelve million Iraqis voted in December of 2005. This sent me the signal that they want their own country—not an American occupied country. They have established a constitution and set up their government with elected officials and various departments. Now they also have to fight those within their country who threaten their democracy. We can assist, but the will has to be theirs.